

Following Jesus 101

Text: Mark 8:27-9:1

Introduction: For many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world the decision to follow Jesus in baptism is truly an act of counting the cost.

Voice of the Martyrs tells the story of a couple named Soro and Ali who returned to Iran in 2002 after living abroad for several years. They counted the cost before returning to Iran, especially as each of their children was born. They knew that following Jesus in Iran could cost them everything.

But despite the potential cost of following Jesus, they knew that the Lord had called them as His witnesses in Iran. They began their ministry by moving in with Ali's family and gently witnessing to his sister and cousins. As a result, they all ended up coming to faith in Christ. Eventually, many other family members also became believers.

Within a few years, their ministry expanded beyond extended family, and they began to plant new house churches. Mindful of the risks, they took precautions with digital files and never kept lists of Christians in their group. As new believers grew in maturity, they requested to be baptized. This was not only a decisive sign of Christian obedience but also an open rejection of their former Islamic faith.

Before baptizing a new believer, Ali asked standard questions about faith, likely similar to the questions I asked of Vivian and Enrique this morning. Do you admit that you are a sinner in need of God's grace? Do you believe that Jesus came to this earth, lived a sinless life, died on the cross to pay for your sin, rose from the grave three days later, and that one day He will return to establish His kingdom forever? Do you commit to living a life of continued obedience to Jesus and His commands.

But Ali also asked these new believers a question that I did not ask Vivian and Enrique: "Are you willing to give up your life for Jesus?" While it is true that all believers must count the cost of following Jesus, that is especially true of the decision to follow Jesus in Iran.

Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Turn with me in your Bible to Mark 8. It begins on page 792 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we encourage you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

We're looking at a pivotal moment in the life and ministry of Jesus. For the first time, Jesus speaks openly about His coming death and resurrection. And along with it, He teaches His disciples what it means to be His disciples. He teaches them what it means to follow Him.

(Read Mark 8:27-9:1...Pray)

Our main idea this morning is very simple: **Followers of Jesus forsake everything for the crucified Christ.**

As we move through the text and unpack that main idea, I want to ask and answer three simple questions:

- Who is Jesus?
- What did Jesus come to do?
- What does Jesus require of me?

I. **Who is Jesus (Mark 8:27-30)?**

A. **This is the exact question that is asked here in Mark 8.**

1. **Look at verse 27. (Read vs. 27)**
2. **Jesus and His disciples went from Bethsaida to the villages of Caesarea Philippi (vs. 27).**
3. **Caesarea Philippi was about 25 miles due north of Bethsaida and the Sea of Galilee.**
4. **It was on that journey to Caesarea Philippi that Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"**
 - a. **Now, we should acknowledge that this is an interesting question.**
 - b. **If you're familiar with the story, as many of us are, it's tempting to read right past the question.**
 - c. **Yeah, yeah. We know what Jesus asks. We've heard that before.**

- d. But think about the question for a minute: “Who do people say that I am?” Why does Jesus ask His disciples this question?
 - e. Is Jesus taking a public opinion poll? Was He looking for approval? Maybe He wants to know if the crowd is impressed with Him.
 - f. Maybe He was concerned about His image. Much like a celebrity or politician would be today. Maybe the disciples were Jesus’ PR firm. They’re supposed to safely guard His image and make sure that people view Him exactly the way He wants to be viewed.
 - g. Or maybe Jesus was wondering what adjustments He needed to make to His message. Maybe people weren’t receiving this repent and believe stuff so well. Maybe He needed to switch to a message that was more focused on love and grace and inclusion and living your best life now. Maybe He needed more miracles and less teaching and preaching. Maybe that would make Him more attractive to the masses.
 - h. No, Goshen, I don’t think it is any of that. Jesus is concerned with this question because of the eternal significance of what people say about Him.
 - i. See, we care about what people say about us because we want people to think well of us for our benefit. Jesus cared about what people said about Him because He wanted people to believe rightly about Him for their benefit.
5. So, Jesus asked His question, “Who do people say that I am?”
- B. And in verse 28 we see the disciples’ response (vs. 28).**
1. (Read vs. 28)
 2. Some were saying that He was John the Baptist. This was exactly what King Herod said about Jesus in Mark 6. He feared that John the Baptist, who he had beheaded, had been raised from the dead.
3. Others were saying He was Elijah or another one of the prophets. This was likely based on a common interpretation of Malachi 4:5-6 that Elijah would be raised from the dead and return to Israel at some point in the future.
 4. But while there was some truth to Jesus being a prophet like Elijah, none of these answers are satisfactory.
 5. In fact, the John the Baptist answer is really strange because Jesus and John were contemporaries. John had baptized Jesus.
 6. The truth is that people today have all kinds of strange and false ideas about who Jesus is.
 - a. Perhaps the strangest is those who say Jesus didn’t exist. Regardless of what you say about who Jesus is, denying the existence of Jesus is a historical absurdity.
 - b. But even among those who acknowledge the existence of Jesus, some want to say that He was simply a good teacher. The problem of course is that Jesus claimed far more than that for Himself.
 - c. Some want to remake Jesus into a progressive activist who never confronts sin. Others want to reduce Him to a conservative culture warrior who exists to endorse their politics.
 - d. The truth is that there are all kinds of strange and false ideas about who Jesus is.
- C. But Jesus wasn’t most concerned with what PEOPLE were saying; He most wanted to know what His DISCIPLES said of Him.**
1. So, He asked them, “But who do YOU say that I am?” (vs. 29a). This was where the rubber met the road for the disciples. What would they say? They had been following Jesus for a couple of years at this point. They had seen Him perform many miracles. They had heard His powerful teaching. They knew He wasn’t John the Baptist or simply one of the prophets. But who was He? What would they say?

2. Well, Peter was the one who spoke up. Peter was kind of the spokesman for the disciples. He was likely Mark's source among the disciples for this Gospel since Mark was not one of the twelve. Peter often stuck his foot in his mouth and got himself into trouble.
3. But here, Peter got the answer exactly right. He said, "You are the Christ (vs. 29b). By that He meant, "You are the Messiah. You are the one that was promised throughout the Old Testament. You are the one we've been waiting for. You are the one who has come to deliver your people."

D. Peter was right, but Jesus' response is interesting, isn't it?

1. Mark writes that Jesus strictly charged them to tell no one about him (vs. 30).
2. The obvious question is "Why?" Why would Jesus tell them to tell no one?
3. Some of it may have been the false ideas people had about the Messiah. We're going to see in a moment that even the disciples misunderstood what Jesus' identity as the Messiah meant for His immediate future.
4. But I think the most obvious reason that Jesus told them to tell no one was because His time had not yet come.
5. Jesus is moving toward the cross in Mark's Gospel, but it's not that time yet. Jesus was not trying to delay the inevitable, but He was on a divinely ordained timetable. Things would happen concerning His death and resurrection just as the Father had ordained.
6. So, He instructs them to tell no one.

Now, we've seen the answer of the people to the question, "Who is Jesus?" And we've seen the answer of the disciples when Jesus asked them, "Who do YOU say that I am?"

E. But this morning, Jesus is asking you the same question: "Who do you say that I am?"

1. Goshen, the way that you answer this question is of utmost importance.
2. See, I think that there are two primary ways that we could go about seeking to answer this question.
 - a. On the one hand, we could gather around in groups and each say who Jesus is to you. To me, Jesus is this. Or to me, Jesus is that. Or I like to think of Jesus in this way. Or I like to think of Jesus in that way. We could approach this question in that way.
 - b. Or we could open our Bibles and see that Jesus has revealed himself perfectly in His Word. Jesus has told us who He is. See, the disciples didn't make up their answer. They knew who Jesus is because God had revealed it to them. That's what Matthew says in his Gospel where he records this same interaction. And Goshen, we can know who Jesus is because God has revealed Him to us in His Word.
 - c. He is the Christ. He is the Son of God. He is God.
 - d. And the question you really need to answer is whether you will acknowledge and accept that what Jesus says about Himself is true.
 - e. And your answer to that question carries with it eternal significance.

We're looking at three essential questions that every follower of Jesus must answer. We've answered the question, "Who is Jesus?" The second question is...

II. What did Jesus come to do (Mark 8:31-33)?

- A. We're told beginning in verse 31 that without their asking, Jesus began to answer this question with His disciples.
 1. Look at verse 31. (Read vs. 31)
 2. He taught them that He would suffer many things.
 3. He taught them that He would be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes.
 4. He taught them that He would be killed.
 5. And He taught them that after three days He would rise again.

B. Again, let's slow down and think about this for a bit.

1. It's easy for us to quickly read past this because we know it's what happened.
2. He did suffer. He was rejected. They did kill Him. And He was raised.
3. But think about Jesus' words from the perspective of the disciples.
 - a. These events had not transpired yet. Jesus was telling them what was going to happen.
 - b. Yes, the disciples knew the Old Testament. Yes, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about the suffering of the Messiah.
 - c. But the disciples were just like everyone else in Israel. They didn't get it.
 - d. They had expectations concerning the Messiah that didn't match what Jesus says here.
 - e. They knew He was the Messiah. But they were expecting the Messiah to overthrow Roman rule. They were expecting the Messiah to set up His kingdom right then and there.
 - f. Not only that, but they had also been with Jesus for a couple of years now. He was their friend. He was their leader. They had seen Him do some amazing things. They didn't want Him to die.
4. But now He says that He's going to suffer many things, be rejected by the religious leaders, be killed, and then rise again.
 - a. And I think the disciples probably didn't even hear that rise again part. Or at least it didn't sink in.
 - b. Because by the time He told them that He was going to be killed, they lost it. They didn't hear anything else after that.

C. In fact, look at Peter's reaction.

1. You gotta love Peter. He's the one who just proclaimed, "You are the Christ!" He had gotten the question right. He's just coming off the finest moment of his life.
2. We know from Matthew's Gospel that Jesus has just said to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
3. And what does He do? He took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him (vs. 32).
 - a. Look at verse 32. (Read vs. 32)
 - b. Jesus! Rebuke! Peter rebukes Jesus!
 - c. I don't know what got into Peter.

D. But notice how Jesus responded.

1. Remember, Peter took Jesus aside for the rebuke. But Jesus doesn't keep His response quiet. He doesn't keep it between Him and Peter.
2. No, Mark writes, "But turning and seeing his disciples" (vs. 33a).
3. And here's what He said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" (vs. 33b).
 - a. Woah! I can just imagine that in that moment Peter had a big lump in his throat.
 - b. The other disciples probably stood real still. Wondering what just happened. Wishing they could slip behind the bushes or something.
4. This is a very strong response from Jesus.
 - a. It stands out because while Jesus sometimes used strong language in His rebukes, His strongest rebukes were always reserved for the religious leaders who were coming to Him with impure motives.

- b. **Here, I don't think Peter's motives were wrong. But in that moment, Peter became the carrier of a demonic doctrine. Peter was encouraging Jesus not to do the very thing that He came to do. Though Peter identified Jesus as the Christ, He was dead wrong about the most important thing that entailed. And Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan!"**
 - c. **This is a reminder to us that good intentions are not sufficient. Truth matters. You either know the truth about Jesus, or you don't. You either believe the truth about Jesus, or you don't. Hell will be filled with lots of people with good intentions. People who did a lot of good works. People who followed another religion thinking they were worshiping the true God. Even people who faithfully attended church, served the church, and gave of their money to the church.**
 - d. **Let's be reminded this morning that what you believe about Jesus and what He did on the cross matters. Anything other than, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not die but have eternal life." Anything that contradicts that truth is a lie. Only Jesus is THE way, THE truth, and THE life. Goshen, no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.**
5. **Jesus goes on in verse 33, "For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (vs. 33c).**
- a. **Peter's focus was in the wrong place.**
 - b. **This was often true of Jesus' disciples. They were focused on temporal things rather than eternal things.**
 - c. **Because Peter was so caught up on his own idea of who Jesus was and what Jesus would do, he missed the real reason for which Jesus had come.**

We've answered the questions "Who is Jesus?" and "What did Jesus come to do?" The final question we need to answer is...

III. What does Jesus require of me (Mark 8:34-9:1)?

- A. **Jesus' attention expands here. He had been speaking to His disciples, but now He calls the crowd to Him along with the disciples. He gave them three things that they must do if they were going to follow Him (vs. 34).**
 - 1. **Look at verse 34. (Read vs. 34)**
 - 2. **First, Jesus says that if you're going to follow Him, you must deny yourself.**
 - a. **I like what Warren Wiersbe says here. He points out that denying self is not the same as self-denial. You practice self-denial when you forgo dessert so you can achieve your weight loss goals. You deny self when you surrender yourself fully to Jesus.**
 - b. **Your purposes and plans for your life fade in favor of His plans and purposes for your life. You set your own desires aside so that you can take up His desires. You cease building your own kingdom so that you can build His. This is the kind of radical denial of self that Jesus was calling the people to here in Mark 8.**
 - c. **This runs counter to everything inside of us and everything pressed upon us by the culture. We're told that we must look out for ourselves. If we don't look out for ourselves, no one else will.**
 - d. **It would have been no different for those who first heard Jesus speak these words in the first century. If they fully understood Him, this was a shocking demand for Jesus to make.**
 - e. **Jesus made it clear that following Him was not about just listening to His teaching. It wasn't about following Him from place to place to see what miracle He would do next.**
 - f. **No, to follow the Savior, you must deny yourself.**
 - 3. **Second, if you're going to follow Jesus, you must take up your cross.**

- a. This is where Jesus gets really intense.
- b. I think we can easily miss the significance of this statement if we're not careful.
- c. You've heard people say before, "Well, I guess that's just my cross to bear." And they're talking about some kind of health issue or some difficult thing in their life. But that's not what Jesus is talking about here.
- d. See, for us, the cross has become a religious symbol. We wear it on jewelry around our necks. We decorate with it. We see a cross and it gives us a warm feeling inside.
- e. But you have to understand, that's now how the crowd would have understood Jesus' words here. For them, the cross was offensive. For them, the cross was an instrument of torture and death. For them, the idea of "taking up your cross" meant that you were carrying it to the place of your execution.
- f. So, when Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and TAKE UP HIS CROSS," it was a call to die. It was a call to die to self. For most of the disciples and perhaps some in the crowd, it was a call to martyrdom. It was a call to follow in the footsteps of the crucified Savior.
- g. I think we have trouble relating to this concept of discipleship from the comfort of our padded pews in our air-conditioned sanctuary. But for many Christians around the world, like the ones in Iran that I spoke about at the beginning of the sermon, this call to suffer and even die for Jesus is very real. And yet, we're often unwilling to accept any level of inconvenience for Jesus. We're unwilling to suffer any level of hardship for the sake of the gospel. We're unwilling to be mocked or ostracized for following Jesus. We want a nice comfy Christian life. And then one day, we want Jesus to take us to heaven without too much pain and suffering in our death.
- h. But Jesus says that if you're going to follow Him, you must take up your cross.

4. Third, if you're going to follow Jesus, you must follow Him.
 - a. This sounds repetitive, but don't miss it. If you're going to follow Jesus, you must truly follow Him.
 - b. Jesus is not looking for half-hearted followers. Jesus is looking for those who will go wherever He leads. He's looking for those who will lay it all on the line. He's looking for those who will trust Him and obey Him no matter what.

B. Jesus follows up His call to true Christian discipleship with four "for" statements in verses 35-38. Each statement begins with the word "for," showing its connection to what Jesus just said in verse 34.

1. In verse 35, Jesus states the paradox between saving and losing. (Read vs. 35)
2. In verse 36, Jesus asks, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (vs. 36). The implied answer is NOTHING!
3. Then in verse 37, Jesus asks again, "For what can a man give in return for his soul?" (vs. 37). Again, the implied answer is NOTHING!
4. And then in verse 38, we see that whoever is ashamed of Jesus, Jesus will be ashamed of them. (Read vs. 38)

C. Jesus' statement at the beginning of chapter 9 is difficult. (Read vs. 1)

1. Is Jesus still speaking to crowd, or has He turned His attention to just the disciples now?
2. What does He mean by "see the kingdom...come with power"? The most common view is that Jesus is referring to the transfiguration. That doesn't seem satisfactory to me, but regardless of what Jesus is referring to exactly, it's a statement of hope.
3. Following Jesus is difficult. The way of the cross is hard. But be sure, the kingdom of God will come with power.

Conclusion: Are you a part of Jesus' kingdom? Are you a follower of Jesus? Have you turned away from your sin and embraced Jesus in faith?

The cost is great, but so are the blessings.

You were far from God because of your sin. But Jesus came to live and die to pay for your sin. If you will turn from your sin and place your trust in Jesus, the Bible says that you will be saved. Not MIGHT be saved. WILL be saved.

I trust that most in this room this morning are followers of Jesus. You've turned from your sin and placed your trust in Jesus. Like Vivian and Enrique did this morning, you've publicly professed your faith in Jesus through baptism. You've aligned yourself with Him.

But are you truly following Jesus in the way that Jesus requires?

I think when many of us hear Jesus say, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," we think that's high-level discipleship stuff. We think that's what Jesus requires of super-Christians. That's what Jesus requires of church leaders. That's what Jesus requires of those who are truly committed.

But Goshen, this is what Jesus requires of every single one of us. Remember, Jesus was speaking to the crowd, not just the twelve. He was speaking to those who had been interested in His teaching. He was speaking to those who loved to see Him perform miracles.

I'm reminded of a couple of instances in the Gospels where Jesus spoke really hard words. On one occasion in John 6, John writes, "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." On another occasion, Jesus spoke to a man we know as the Rich Young Ruler. He was very rich, and Jesus called him to sell everything and give the money to the poor. In other words, Jesus called him to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus.

And Mark 10:22 is one of the most heartbreaking verses in all the Bible. Mark writes, "Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

I'm afraid that some of us in this room this morning would hear the words of Jesus, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," and leave sorrowful because after counting the cost, we would determine that the cost of following Jesus is just too great. The price is too high. And in trying to gain the world, you would forfeit your soul.

May it never be.